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Nee-Me-Poo National Recreation Trail

Hells Canyon
National Recreation Area



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
Pacific Northwest Region
USDA • Forest Service

Reserve
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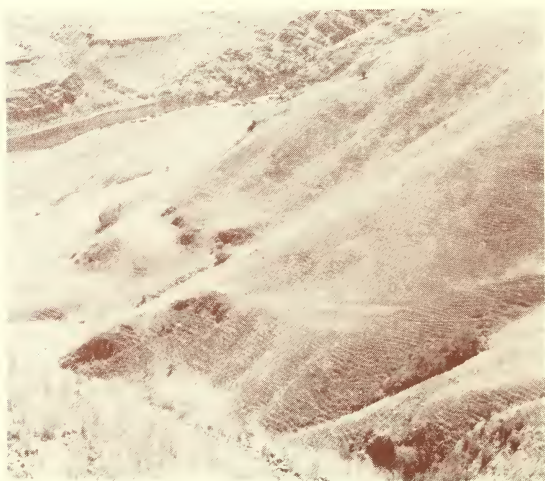


CHIEF JOSEPH

Welcome to the Nee-Me-Poo National Recreation Trail

Many years have passed since a tribe of about 700 Nez Perce Indians embarked upon an historic flight to freedom in an attempt to remain a free and unfettered people. Their journey covered approximately 1800 miles. While marred with more than 20 skirmishes, 5 major battles and a bitter ending, it proved their strength of conviction, their remarkable endurance and the great leadership of the proud Indian tribe.

A 3.7 mile section of the trail they followed (Nee-Me-Poo) traverses the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. The chief of the Forest Service has designated this trail a National Recreation Trail as a reminder of the Nation's history as provided for by the National Trails System Act of 1968.



"Let me be a free man — free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade, where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself — and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty."

Chief Joseph
Jan. 14, 1879

History

The Nez Perce Treaty of 1855 reserved vast areas of land for the Nez Perce Indian Tribe. The land stretched from what is now central Idaho to the eastern edges of both Washington and Oregon. Tucked remotely away in the Oregon allotment was the beautiful and fertile Wallowa Valley. Here, among the picturesque setting and the superior hunting grounds, Chief Tu-eka-kas (Chief Joseph's father) and his band of Nez Perce lived peacefully. For unnumbered generations the Wallowa Valley had been the home of their ancestors.

Hostilities began when settlers and cattlemen increasingly trespassed upon the Indian's land. In 1861, when gold was discovered in Orofino, Idaho, 10,000 miners invaded their home land in search of the precious mineral. The friendly Indians became restless.

In 1863, the U.S. Government offered a new treaty in an attempt to pacify the new settlers and give unobstructed access to the newly discovered mines. Chief Tu-eka-kas refused to sign the treaty because it totally excluded the Wallowa Valley and outlying areas from the Indian's land. However, a number of Chiefs whose interests were not affected, signed the new treaty and the Government contended that all the Nez Perce were bound. Tu-eka-kas and his tribe were to leave the Wallowa Valley and move to the newly designated Lapwai reservation in Idaho.

Tu-eka-kas ignored the treaty, and despite grievances against the Government, skillfully maintained peace with the settlers. He and his people remained in the Wallowa Valley until his death.

With Tu-eka-kas now in his grave, the mantle of authority fell upon Joseph. His young braves were held in check in spite of the growing resentment felt at losing more land and horses to an increasing white population. The Gov-

ernment continued to urge Joseph to give up the land peacefully and move his people to the reservation.

Finally, in the spring of 1877, General Howard of the United States Army became impatient and notified Chief Joseph that he must move within 30 days or be driven out by soldiers. Joseph, realizing the unfavorable odds of a fight with the U.S. Army, reluctantly agreed to move.

The disappointed tribe dismantled their Wallowa Valley camp for the last time in late May of 1877, moving off toward the Snake River. Chief Joseph's band consisted of approximately 400 indians, including about 64 braves, ages 16 and over. They took over 1,000 head of horses and cattle, leaving much of their stock behind. The Nee-Me-Poo National Recreation Trail was the route followed to the Snake River.

After crossing the Snake River, Joseph's people joined with other bands of Nez Perce and a small group of Palouses. Thereafter, the historical Nez Perce War began, turning the peaceful journey into a flight for freedom and sanctuary in Canada.

Every mile of the retreat brought danger. Aided by Chief Joseph's surpassing military genius, the Nez Perce confused and outwitted the 2,000 regular troops of the United States Army. Though the warriors were encumbered with women, children and the elderly throughout their flight, they were able to outdistance the fresh troops continually appearing in their path.

Joseph and his people came to the end of their bloody trail in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana, only 30 miles from the Canadian refuge. Hemmed in by winter snow the Indians were besieged by the U.S. Army and forced to surrender. After three months of unquestionable grief, anxiety and hardship, Joseph, in a pathetic, yet dramatic surrender, said: "From where the sun now shines, I shall fight no more forever."

Climate

The Snake River Canyon climate is characterized by mild winters and hot, dry summers. The area's annual precipitation of approximately 8 inches falls mainly in the winter and spring months as rain and some light snow.

Summer thunderstorms may cause some erosion from intense rainfall, but these storms are infrequent. Mean annual temperature is approximately 60°F with highs ranging to over 100°F in the summer months and lows of 0°F in the winter.

The trail can be used at least 10 months of the year and sometimes year around, depending on the amount of snow.

Points of Interest

Lone Pine Saddle — The view from Lone Pine Saddle of the Snake River Canyon and the Imnaha River drainage is outstanding, adding a dimension of space and beauty for hikers.

Prickly Pear Cactus — prickly pear cactus are abundant along the Nee-Me-Poo Trail. The cactus is generally in full bloom during the spring.

Interpretive Sign — An interpretive sign, located at Dug Bar, tells the story of the Nez Perce journey and locates their epic crossing of the flooding Snake River.

Safety

The most notable hazard for public use of the trail is the presence of an occasional rattlesnake during the summer months. Snake bite kits are recommended.

Water

No water is available on the trail. Hikers should carry their own water.

Wildlife

Due to the mild climate and plentiful plant life, a variety of wildlife, particularly deer, can be observed from the trail.

Nee-Me-Poo = the real people



"The earth is the mother of all people,
and all people should have equal
rights upon it."

Chief Joseph
Jan. 14, 1879

Access

From the south, the trail can be reached by taking State Highway No. 350 from Joseph, Oregon to the town of Imnaha. From Imnaha, take the graveled County Road No. 735 north to Fence Creek. Beyond this point, the road (now designated Forest Road 4260) deteriorates into a steep, narrow dirt road unsuitable for vehicles pulling trailers. Passenger cars may be used during dry weather by carefully negotiating this last segment of approximately 10 miles.

The Trail may also be entered from the north at Dug Bar on the Snake River. Dug Bar is reached by jet boating up river from the mouth of the Grande Ronde River (about 28 miles) or by float trip downstream from Hells Canyon Dam (about 51 miles).

Philosophy of the trail

The Nee-Me-Poo Trail is a historical feature rather than a common destination trail. It can be used and experienced for its spiritual value. Hikers have an opportunity to walk in the footsteps of Chief Joseph and his people.

Protection of the Trail

The Nee-Me-Poo Trail represents a wealth of Indian and Pioneer history which must be preserved for future generations. Enjoy, but please don't destroy your American heritage.



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